

ON TRACK WITH MDT

October 2001

Much has changed since last month's newsletter and I, like many, have found myself struggling to make sense of the tragedy that has befallen this nation. My reflections one day reminded me of a quote from Albert Einstein, who said, "The splitting of the atom has changed everything except the way we think. And if we don't change the way we think, we will ruin everything." This prophetic statement, made over 50 years ago, rings true today across the world and within each of us.

As MDT's director, I believe that the challenge of changing the way we think must be applied to the work we do, both here at MDT and out on our highways and thoroughfares. This is a message I have been sharing with my employees, and I would like to share it with you as well. My message is simple: building and maintaining a quality product is crucial, and we cannot do it alone. We can and must rely on the symbiotic relationships that are crucial to providing quality roads for all of Montana, for, in my mind at least, we are the legs of the stool that is the Montana transportation system. When I look to the future of road construction, I see three legs – MDT, the design consultants and the contractors – working together to make this state a leader nationwide in terms of the roads we build.

Becoming a leader is no easy task, and I see education as a major part of this process. As a result, my goal over the next several months will be to share information on the processes that are key to road building, for I see this as a wonderful opportunity to increase understanding of why we do what we do. The issue of environmental permitting is a great place to start, for the state of Montana needs to protect the quality of its water for future generations, and that means regulating all industries, not just road construction. Even though we may not think about it, the issue of obtaining environmental water quality permits for highway projects is essential to ensuring that stream water and wetland quality is maintained and that polluted runoff from storm water is minimized during construction activities, and that begins with permits obtained during the preconstruction process.

When designing a project, MDT and the design consultants work with the Army Corps of Engineers on what we call the *Clean Water Act Section 404* authorizations for live water sites (i.e. wetlands, creeks and lakes) and with the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks on *Stream Protection Act 124* permits dealing with fish habitats and similar issues. Once the project is let, MDT and the contractor work with Montana Department of Environmental Quality or the Environmental Protection Agency on what we call *Section 402* or storm water/discharge permits. We also work with the contractor on any additional 404 or 402 permits needed for temporary structures erected during the project.

From preconstruction through completion, each of us plays a role in making the permitting process work. MDT needs to keep up-to-date on permitting regulations and ensure that all requests are properly submitted. The design firms can help by designing

projects that are easier to permit and by obtaining their permits in a timely manner. And the contractors can help by obtaining and abiding by all necessary permits so that the project can be completed free of fines and unplanned mediation.

While complex and often time-consuming, the permitting process is a crucial component of our road-building process. To make it work, we must change the way we think. A project is not MDT's project or the consultant's project or the contractor's project. Every project is "our" project and one that each of us can and should be proud to call our own. My goal is for everyone on a project – from the flagger to the project manager to me, the director – to view it that way, for then we will have a venture that we can all be proud of. That's part of "being on track" with MDT.

Dave Galt
Director